United Nations

# Centre against Apartheid

Notes and Documents

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## SPECIAL COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID EVALUATES DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND SETS OUT PLAN OF ACTION FOR 1991

Statement by H.E. Mr. Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria), Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid, at United Nations Headquarters on 31 January 1991 upon his re-election as Chairman

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Statement by H.E. Mr. Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria), Chairman of the Special Committee against Apartheid

The year 1991 will be particularly challenging for the Special Committee against Apartheid. Developments in South Africa and their repercussions on the international response to apartheid need to be closely monitored and analysed. With the assistance of the Centre against Apartheid, the Special Committee will react responsibly to these developments and also anticipate them and express its position, having always in mind the need to assist the process of genuine negotiations and the speedy adoption of a democratic and non-racial constitution in South Africa.

The ongoing political process in South Africa may not always be smooth. There is no doubt that a process of change as complex as the one that South Africa is entering into will give rise to a dynamic debate on the future of the country. In this context, it is important to recognize that South Africa is still essentially a violent society that has been ravaged by the effects of apartheid. Hence, debate on different political views can often lead to violent acts. For its part, the black majority has taken steps in the right direction. The Special Committee welcomes the agreement reached two days ago between the African National Congress of South Africa (ANC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party and hopes that this will contribute to bringing together the majority in facing the challenges ahead. Open debate is essential as it can help define not only the basic aspects of a post-apartheid society but also the incipient elements of what a true democratic system can be.

Already some setbacks have occurred that are related to the unacceptable levels of violence that have prevailed in South Africa for the last few months. We have seen the regime, either by neglect or design, fail to take the necessary and impartial measures to bring this violence under control and to punish the perpetrators. We have seen the authorities, either intentionally or because of internal frictions, delay the implementation of agreements reached with ANC, based on the Pretoria Minute. We have witnessed acts perpetrated by the regime that fly in the face of their announced intentions to create a climate conducive to negotiations. Whether these events are part of a grand design or are the result of the reactions of those in the system who oppose the democratic transformation of the country, the fact remains that Pretoria has not fulfilled its promises and its obligations emanating from its agreements with ANC or from the will of the international community as expressed by consensus repeatedly during 1990.

The promotion of the peaceful process of negotiations will thus be central to the Special Committee's task in 1991. Particular attention will be paid to the elimination of obstacles to this process related to the social and economic inequities of the country. Assistance to the disadvantaged sections of South Africa and to the victims of apartheid will be foremost among the Special Committee's concerns.

The other main aspect of the Special Committee's work will consist of monitoring and influencing the international response to the evolving changes in South Africa. It is foreseeable that in the coming months pressure will mount from some quarters to relax the level of sanctions imposed on South Africa. There are indications that the European Community, having lifted its ban on new investments in December 1990, may proceed later in 1991 to abrogate some other restrictive measures. Similar tendencies could be encountered in the United States of America. At the same time, some Eastern European States and even some African States are proceeding to normalize or open diplomatic relations and, what is more disquieting, to establish or strengthen commercial and other links with South Africa.

It is the position of the Special Committee, in line with the resolution adopted by the General Assembly by consensus in September 1990 and reiterated in December 1990, that the international community should "maintain measures aimed at applying pressure on the South African regime to eradicate apartheid and to promote profound and irreversible changes, having in mind the objectives of the Declaration [on Apartheid and its Destructive Consequences in Southern Africa], namely the speedy eradication of apartheid and the establishment of a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa".

It is possible that following the announcements that Mr. De Klerk will make tomorrow, the Group Areas Act and Lands Act will be repealed in the next few months and by the end of April all political prisoners may be released and all political exiles may be permitted to return to South Africa without restrictions. We earnestly hope that this will indeed be the case. Furthermore, we hope that the process of repeal of these laws becomes, in effect, a mechanism for consultation and decision-making with all the communities affected by these laws. The process could face serious obstacles if it were not accompanied by a thorough programme of economic and social redress of the inequities created by the implementation of those laws. It is also probable that following such positive developments an all-parties conference could take place in South Africa if agreement on its modalities could be reached among all the parties concerned. At that time we could

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expect anti-apartheid forces in South Africa to advise the international community whether the time is ripe to consider relaxation of some measures. But the report of the Secretary-General on the progress being made in the implementation of the Declaration to be published in June 1991, and the conclusions that the Special Committee would reach after consulting with the relevant parties, both inside and outside South Africa, should help the international community to decide on its policies regarding sanctions.

What appears inescapable is that the international community has the duty to maintain pressure on South Africa during the whole process of negotiations and until a new constitution establishing a non-racial democracy in South Africa is adopted. The question that will have to be answered is what should be the appropriate nature of that pressure. The Special Committee plans to contribute to this debate and hopes that the answer will be reached through another international consensus.

After a careful consideration of all those anticipated developments, the Special Committee has prepared a detailed programme of work for 1991. May I say, however, that the Committee's planned activities encompass sufficient flexibility to enable it to respond to changing circumstances and to meet the objectives defined above. As you know, the Committee plans to hold a Symposium on Cultural and Academic links with South Africa, which is now scheduled to take place at Los Angeles next April. This symposium is expected to give the Committee the opportunity to consult with the non-racial, democratic cultural and academic organizations of South Africa on a redefinition of appropriate policies in the cultural and academic fields and spearhead a new constructive approach.

The Seminar with South American Members of Parliament, which is tentatively scheduled to take place at Santiago, in the first half of 1991 and the Seminar on Eastern European Action against Apartheid, scheduled for Prague in June, have as objectives the need to inform and sensitize public opinion in these two regions on the issue of apartheid South Africa and to consult with decision makers about the import of developments in that country and the appropriate international response. A meeting with selected United States and Western European Parliamentarians will aim at discussing the nature and level of appropriate pressure on South Africa that should be maintained until apartheid is totally eradicated.

The consultations with the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scheduled for the second part of 1991, will be indispensable in forging a common position with anti-apartheid NGOs

around the world. These consultations will be even more essential than those of last September because the issue of sanctions, which form the core of the activities of NGOs, will probably be under challenge from many fronts by that time. Furthermore, the two encounters with journalists will give the Special Committee the opportunity to publicize its position and its assessment of the developments in South Africa and the world's response to them.

In addition, the Special Committee is planning to hold later in 1991 two important seminars, one on the educational needs of the victims of apartheid and another on economic issues related to the eradication of apartheid. The first seminar will give the Committee a leading role in analysing and publicizing the educational needs of black South Africans and launching a campaign for international assistance. The seminar on economic issues, on the other hand, will highlight the current economic inequities, examine how they can obstruct the political process and discuss an appropriate response to these problems, including the role of the United Nations system in assisting in what the Declaration called the promotion of the advancement of the well-being of all South Africans.

At the end of April 1991, the Special Committee will issue an interim annual report that will give an assessment of the situation in South Africa between October 1990 and March 1991 and the international response during that period. Given the tempo of developments, the Committee felt that it should not wait until October to produce an analysis of the situation in South Africa. A number of other studies and papers that the Centre will prepare will deal with some critical issues that are currently being faced in South Africa.

We hope that the initiative that the Secretary-General and the Centre against Apartheid will take towards ensuring the coordination of the activities of the United Nations system in the implementation of the Declaration will help in avoiding premature initiatives, inconsistencies or duplication among offices and agencies of the system.

The Special Committee intends to be a very active and relevant subsidiary organ of the General Assembly in promoting the speedy eradication of apartheid through peaceful means. Sometime in 1991 the Committee may be ready to visit South Africa and consult with all parties concerned. The main purpose of such a visit would be to encourage the implementation of the consensus Declaration as well as the process of negotiations towards the speedy eradication of apartheid and the creation of a united, democratic and non-racial South Africa.

Having been mandated by the international community to monitor the process leading to that goal, the Special Committee has a positive duty to remind the international community that the negotiations about to start in South Africa will not be held between equals. On the contrary, the negotiations will be between those whose authority is based on a system that has been universally condemned on the one hand, and those whose struggle is for the realization of the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the other. The moral and political element which is at the heart of the problem should not be lost. Our duty is clearly to help ensure that the international community treats the two sides in the negotiations with appropriate differentiation. And it is our further duty to help ensure that the imbalance of power on the two sides of the negotiating table does not become an impediment to the creation of a just society in that country.

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Courtesy of Centre against Apartheid